

A BOY WHO SHOTS WITH CHAMPIONS.

When that enthusiastic company of crack wing-shots of the country shall again face the traps in another Grand American Handicap race—the greatest of all the live-bird contests of the year's shooting calendar—they will in all probability find a new and extremely youthful aspirant for the most coveted honors for an opponent.

Little "Conny" Ferguson, or Cornelius Ferguson, III., as he takes pride in writing his name, when nine years of age was elected a member of the New Utrecht "Red and Green Club," one of the best-known of the many shooting organizations that bound in and around the Greater New York, and which includes, besides his own father, Cornelius Ferguson, Jr., such famous shooters as G. W. Conison, Tom Torrey, the Handicap winner of '94; Tom Keller, Captain A. W. Money, Noel E. oney, the Durea boys, William Lair, J. N. and C. M. Meyer, W. G. Clark and others.

"Conny" was born in the old town of New Utrecht (which has within a recent

period become almost at once a part of the city of Brooklyn and a ward of New York), in January, 1883, at which time his grandfather, the original "Cornel" Ferguson, himself an ardent sportsman with rod and gun, was known politically as the "Czar." The elder Ferguson, besides attending to his duties as a many-time Supervisor and Shore Inspector of the State Coast, managed to find time with his son, Cornelius, Jr., now a prosperous lawyer, to spend a few hours weekly at the traps. It was upon such occasions that the third and last of the Corneliuses first heard the voice and learned the uses of the gun, at the handling of which few were more expert than his own father. It was not unusual, therefore, that he, too, should become infatuated with the sport. As soon as he was able to be begged for a real gun to take the place of the crude "putty-blower" affair that the ingenuity of his childhood had rudely constructed. He had passed his seventh birthday before his appeals and tears were answered, and then his father, Cornelius, Jr., presented him with a 32-gauge shotgun of the Spencer type. It was a diminutive affair, scarcely more than a toy, yet it brought unspeakable joy to the heart of the young Nimrod.

As a souvenir of his admission to the full-fledged dignity of club membership and the privilege of contesting with the "real men," Conny was presented with a new gun of French manufacture, 10-gauge, and weighing 4½ pounds, with 24-inch barrels. The ambition of the youngster's life was now gratified. The honors conferred upon him were not lost, for his deportment, borne of long and constant companionship with those beyond his years, had won for him the designation of "Little Man." With his new gun he did some really wonderful work, winning prize after prize, and it was not long before he could hold his own with the best shots of the New Utrecht Club on their own level of a club handicap. He surprised them all—even the older shooters—during the season of 1894, doing some very remarkable work, week after week, at the club shoots, which are held at Woodlawn Park, L. I., and it looked very much as though he would finish the year in the lead. The boys were not altogether realized, but when the averages for the year were made up and the award of prizes made, it was found that "Conny" had only been relegated to second place by the very narrow margin of one point. As it was, he received a handsome gold watch for his superior skill, his score having been ninety-four kills out of a possible hundred. The winner of the first prize—C. A. Sykes—had only scored one more bird.

When it is remembered that the New Utrecht grounds are noted for their fast traps and first-class birds, the achievement is a great one. About a year ago "Conny" had a new Greener gun built especially for him, weighing 16 pounds, and of beautiful workmanship and finish. At first he shot poorly with it, as the added weight did not seem to fit him as well as his little 10-gauge. He laid it aside for a while, but a few months ago tried his new piece for a second time, and has shot it ever since, and with it accomplished some of his best scores. He has taken part in nearly all the New Utrecht shoots, when they have not interfered with his studies, and, notwithstanding that the club numbers some of the foremost shooters in the country—holding, as they do, the New York State team championship—has always been able to hold his own.

"Conny" has shot several match races during the past year, the most notable being one against his father, at fifty birds. The contest proved to be one of main strength, for, while the boy was defeated, he led as far as the thirty-fifth round, when he began to falter. At the conclusion one member offered to back "Conny" for \$500 against his father, under the same conditions, excepting that the number of birds be made twenty-five. Ferguson, Jr., who recently won the Cobweb Handicap, declined.

The boy's most notable match was with Count C. F. Lennox, of Passaic, in February last, the conditions being thirty birds each, the Count standing at the 28-yard mark and "Conny" at the 26-yard line. He defeated the Count easily, killing twenty-eight of his thirty, the Count being able to grab but eighteen.

"Conny" Ferguson is without question the best live-bird shot of his age in the world to-day—a fact that is conceded by all the authorities of the sport. He is a well-built, well-built little fellow, of amiable manner and the nerve of a veteran, which nothing disturbs at the traps, and he is, beside, one of the bright pupils at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute.



CONNIE FERGUSON AT THE TRAPS.

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